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SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS: FIRST ROUND RESULTS SUGGEST BIG
GAINS FOR GOVERNING COALITION

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 411

11. (SBU) Summary: Results for the first round of Haiti's partial Senate elections released April 27 show candidates of the pro-government Lespwa coalition running first or second in nine of the eleven races. No candidate gained an absolute majority in the first round of voting. All eleven seats thus remain in play for the second round of voting June 7. Electoral authorities have still not set a date for a re-run of first round voting for a twelfth seat in the Central Plateau, where voting there was suspended on election day due to incidents of violence and ballot theft. Of the other political parties, only the Struggling People's Organization (OPL) approached Lespwa's dominance, with five candidates surviving the first round of voting. Lespwa's success may fuel allegations that the coalition benefited unfairly from state resources or undeclared private donations during the campaign. Turnout was low: the election authority reported that 11.3 percent of registered voters went to the polls, and only 2.9 percent in Haiti's largest Department, the West, which includes the capital. End summary.

UNEXPECTEDLY STRONG SHOWING FOR LESPWA

12. (SBU) Official results released April 27 by the Provisional Electoral Authority (CEP) showed that the Lespwa coalition, under whose banner President Rene Preval won election in 2006, will have a second round candidate in each of the nine departments where voting will take place on June 17. Other, traditionally strong parties, including the Struggling People's Organization (OPL -- 5 candidates going into the runoff round), the Fusion of Social Democrats (Fusion -- 2 candidates), and Union (1 candidate), fared less well. No candidate won an outright majority in the first round. In many cases, Lespwa candidates performed significantly better than a pre-election local poll and field observations indicated (reftel), a mild surprise that may encourage critics of Lespwa who say they have evidence that official state vehicles and resources were placed at the disposition of Lespwa candidates in many races.

13. (SBU) A number of well-known personalities figure among Lespwa's second round candidates, including the brother of Senator Joseph Lambert (Wencesclass Lambert) and the head of the majority CPP bloc in the Chamber of Deputies, Lucas Sainvil. In addition, a handful of refugees from former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's struggling Fanmi Lavalas

party have opportunistically joined the Lespwa coalition, namely former Deputy Franky Exius in the South Department, Cite Soleil community organizer Joseph Joel John in the West Department, and Moise John Charles in the North Department, who is suspected of involvement in political violence before Aristide's departure.

REPEATED CALLS TO INVALIDATE ELECTION RESULTS

¶4. (SBU) After the release of official election results, some candidates continued calls to annul the elections, citing low voter turnout, and claims of fraud and other irregularities. Press reports say that OPL (North) Senate candidate Eliscar Charles and Fusion (North) Senate candidate Marie Ghislaine Mompremier stormed into the Departmental Electoral Bureau (BED) in the North Department April 27 and demanded the cancellation of results in the communes of Acul du Nord and Milot. The candidates, who accused North Department BED President Yvon Jean Noel of collusion with the Lespwa party candidate, were reportedly led away by police at Noel's request. There were also calls by smaller political parties to invalidate election results. Christian Movement for a New Haiti (MOCHRENA) President Luc Mesadieu and Grand Assembly for the Evolution of Haiti (GREH) leader (and former Haitian Army colonel) Himmler Rebu demanded that the election results be thrown out because of low turnout and reports of fraud. Neither party fielded candidates for the election.

¶5. (SBU) Former CEP Secretary General Rosemond Pradel criticized the CEP's management of the electoral process, but

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stopped short of calling for invalidation of election results. Pradel told the press April 27 that he was discouraged by weak voter participation. He blamed low voter turnout on the election day prohibition of public transport, voter confusion on where to vote and a general climate of disinterest as a result of the country's 'economic crisis.'

(Note: CEP officials estimated voter participation at approximately 11.3 percent nationwide and 2.9 percent in the West Department, including Port-au-Prince. The Northeast Department registered the largest voter turnout with 29.8 percent participation. End note)

¶6. (SBU) At an April 27 press conference, CEP Director General Pierre-Louis Opont said that a commission of inquiry will soon be established to review cases of violence and malfeasance alleged during Center Department elections on April 19 that led to cancellation of voting there (reftel). Opont told Poloff April 23 that the CEP had not decided when Center Department elections would be held and would not confirm they would be combined with the June 7 second-round elections.

¶7. (U) The seventy-two hour period during which political parties may contest the results as outlined in Article 178 of the Electoral Law commences April 28. Official protests for all departments except the West will be heard by the Department Bureaus of Electoral Contests (BCED). Protests in the West Department will be heard by the National Bureau of Electoral Contests (BCEN).

SANDERSON